

RATLEY, KATE

INTERVIEW

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An Interview with Mrs. Kate Ratley, Muskogee.  
By - Elizabeth Ross - Investigator.  
February 24, 1938.

Mrs. Kate Ratley was born in Fort Smith, Arkansas, in 1870. Her father, William Sweeney, was born in Dublin, Ireland, and later lived in Glasgow, Scotland. Her mother's maiden name was Mary Ann Daly and she, too, was born in Dublin, Ireland. While quite a young man William Sweeney and his two brothers sailed from Glasgow, Scotland, to America. The parents of Mary Ann Daly also came to America about this time. The Daly family disembarked from their ship at New Orleans, Louisiana, and took a boat bound for Fort Smith, Arkansas. Here also were the Sweeney family. Previous to their meeting in Fort Smith, William Sweeney and Mary Ann Daly were not acquainted. At this time Mary Ann was fifteen years of age and shortly before her sixteenth birthday she became the wife of William Sweeney.

Kate Sweeney was born and passed her early childhood at Fort Smith, Arkansas. She attended a Catholic primary school. In 1871 her parents removed to Indian Territory and settled at a place near the present town of Gore, Oklahoma. She attended school in a small log building that

was taught by a Mr. Adair. After about two years residence in the Indian Territory the Sweeney family removed to Carthage, Missouri, but in the Spring of 1886 they returned to the Territory.

Kate Sweeney was married to Mose Jefferson Ratley, a Cherokee citizen, September 10, 1886 at Fort Gibson. She was of the Catholic faith. The ceremony was performed according to the law of the Cherokee Nation, by Judge Timothy Walker of the Illinois District.

Mr. and Mrs. Ratley became the parents of six children, four of whom died in infancy. A son, L. W. Ratley, lives on Oklahoma Avenue in Muskogee. Her daughter, Beulah, married Robert O. Sullivan who died nineteen years ago and Mrs. Sullivan now lives in Fort Worth, Texas.

Mr. and Mrs. Ratley lived on a farm where Hyde Park now is situated from 1886 until 1904. In 1904 the family removed to town in order to place the children in school, their small son being about eight years of age. He attended the Bacone School.

Mr. Ratley had the contract to furnish the Bacone School with wood for heating purposes and sold this school

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many cords of wood within a year. The family also kept seven or eight cows for milking and when Professor Bacone needed milk for preparing ice cream for the school he called on Mrs. Ratley for the required quantity.

Mrs. Ratley recalls the period in which the United States soldiers were stationed at Fort Gibson, when the cannon was fired at sunrise and at sundown. The soldiers came to Muskogee to do their shopping and mounted on their handsome saddle horses crossed the Arkansas River on the ferry boat as bridges were then unknown.

On one occasion Mrs. Ratley's two older sisters started to Webbers Falls for groceries. They rode on horseback or side saddles and while crossing the Arkansas River one of the horses became unmanageable. Its rider was thrown into the muddy waters and the situation was becoming serious, when, quickly, two men who happened to be on the bank of the river, rowed out in their skiff and soon the girl was rescued from danger of drowning.

Mrs. Ratley recalls that the full blood Indians were fond of visiting. She was visiting her older sister once and upon looking out she saw a great number of Cherokees

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sitting, some on their ponies, and some on the fence. Her sister told her that the Indians wished to remain to eat, so large quantities of food was prepared, the cooking being done, for the greater part, on the fireplace. The bread was baked in a large iron skillet, with live coals placed beneath and above the lid.

When Mrs. Ratley first came to the section near Muskogee the corn fields were only small patches. The undergrowth of cane and shrubbery was so dense that one could not see a man at a distance of three feet. The roads were so muddy in the rainy season that one dreaded to start to town for fear of being stuck in mud. Farm wagons and buggies were used.

In those days catfish, six or seven feet in length, were gilled by full blood Cherokees in the Illinois river for 50 cents apiece and the steaks thus obtained were delicious. Bill Goings, Bill Toney and Mr. Harlow (who also dug for gold) were some of the Cherokee men who sold fish. The smaller fish were so plentiful that one could scoop up a bucket full. On one occasion two of Mrs. Ratley's sisters were attacked by a garfish and

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narrowly escaped. The danger was that the gar might have bitten off a leg or arm.

All kinds of game were plentiful and wild turkeys flew down in front of the gate and venison hams sold for 50 cents per pair. Fryers were 5 cents each. Eggs were 5 cents per dozen. Squirrels came into the country in great numbers in 1881. They ate all the green corn on the stalks and destroyed the fields of cotton. The squirrels were so numerous that they appeared to be growing on the branches of the trees. Mrs. Ratley's father killed a great number of squirrels for food and on one occasion there was a black one which her mother at first thought was a skunk.

The Ratley family made trips to Fort Smith for the greater part of their clothing on account of the lower prices which prevailed at that town. The prices at Fort Smith were lower than prices were in the Nation. Corn in sacks was taken to the mill to be ground into meal.